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China Getting Its First Toehold in the Caribbean

By IRWIN GOODWIN
Special to The Miami Herald

GEORGETOWN, Guyana — The second coming of the Chinese to the Caribbean is about to begin.

The last time they were brought as underpaid and overworked coolies by English planters after the African slaves were emancipated in 1834. Along with the more numerous, similarly indentured laborers from India and Pakistan, the Chinese came for the backbreaking job of cutting and harvesting the region's predominant crop, sugar. Their migration ended only with World War I.

This time the Chinese are coming because they want to and chances are good that they will have far more impact than the first time.

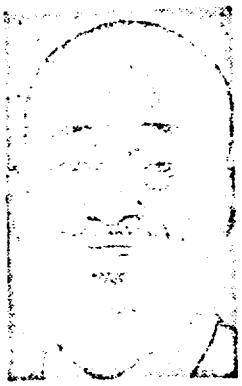
Today, while there are Chinese shopkeepers, merchants, restaurateurs and farmers in Trinidad, Cuba and Jamaica, the largest colony probably is in Guyana, which, until its independence in 1966, had been known as British Guiana. Nearly the size of the state of Minnesota, Guyana rests on the southeast shoulder of South America, largely undeveloped and sparsely settled. Out of a population of 720,000, about 50,000 are of Chinese ancestry — most notably its president, Frank Chung.

PERHAPS because of this, Communist China chose Guyana as a logical land for negotiating the first bilateral trade agreement in the Caribbean area. It calls for $15 million of trade each way over the next five years on a quid pro quo basis, with China providing one or two textile plants as a starter and Guyana shipping alumina ore, timber and possibly sugar.

The deal has deeper meanings for both countries.

While exercising a policy that is patently cautious, as it has during the Indo-Pakistan War, China is confronting both the Soviet Union and United States in Guyana. In a parallel ploy, Guyana is impudently turning away from the United States in hope of becoming an economic model for the "Third World" and the political leader in the Caribbean. Neither strategy, it appears, involves real brinkmanship.

BY ESTABLISHING an economic beachhead at one end of the Caribbean (Georgetown is roughly 2,100 miles as the jets fly from both Miami and Havana),



Forbes Burnham
... new China deal

Peking will be expanding peacefully into an area that has been in the 20th Century, certainly up to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the uncontested American Mare Nostrum.

It seems scarcely credible that China now looks upon the Caribbean as a kind of Geo-political Mediterranean — that is, a cockpit of power, as, indeed, the Caribbean was from the 16th Century to 19th Century when Europe's armadas fought over it. Most likely the Chinese plan simply to provide a Dale Carnegie lesson in winning friends and influencing people on the cheap.

Earlier this month, after Guyana's energetic and able Prime Minister Forbes Burnham revealed his new deal with China, variously described as a protocol and "agreement in principle," one of his closest aides, Christopher Nascimento, taunted a U.S. embassy official here by asking: "Aren't you chaps worried about our approach to China?"

The official embassy line is that Burnham hopes to worry Washington into coming up with more aid. "We've grown up," says an embassy source. "We are more sophisticated and can abide China's presence down here."

BURNHAM'S arch political rival, Cheddi Jagan, however, sees it as a dark and devious plot hatched in Washington. In a parliamentary debate and in a lengthy interview, Jagan insisted that he did not oppose dealings with Peking but that it is a subterfuge "to drive another wedge between China and the Soviet Union."

Jagan believes the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is still manipulating Guyana's affairs. He has good reason for his opinion.

Two CIA operations helped bring down the government of pro-Marxist Jagan in 1964.

Burnham poohpoohs Jagan's suggestion. He claimed that his only concern was to improve the lot of Guyana. "We are nobody's puppet. We also have learned not to put our eggs in one basket.

To begin with, China will provide technical know how in manufacturing and farming, especially rice farming. The textile mills will follow. In his quest for self-sufficiency in feeding, housing and clothing all Guyanese, Burnham observed that China [illegible] than the U.S. has been so far.

SINCE BURNHAM replaced Jagan in the 1964 election, the U.S. Agency for International Development has poured $109 million in loans, grants and food-for-peace programs into Guyana — the largest per capita figure in the whole hemisphere.

The biggest single amount — nearly $13 million — has been devoted to improving rice production.

Burnham, whose favorite game is solitaire, is playing a curious card. On the face of it, he is seeking economic aid from any source, but in doing so he is threatening the friendship of his greatest benefactor to date, the U.S.

IN RESPONSE, Burnham pointed to President Nixon's recent approach to Peking as "a definite sign that Washington will not frown on us here in Georgetown."

Burnham argued that it would not be in the best self-interest of the U.S. to suspend aid to Guyana because that would make his nation even more reliant on China at a critical time when all superpowers are using economic trade and aid to influence world events.

BURNHAM is too fervent a nationalist to dance to anyone's tune, say several observers, both inside and outside the government. What he is after, they continue, is, first, economic viability at home and political prestige abroad.

His deal with China shows the kind of guts that few leaders in the Caribbean either possess or profess. Since Burnham has already expressed his desire to leave several British "associated states," such as the islands of St. Vincent, St. Kitts-Nevis, Dominica and Grenada, into a political union run from Georgetown, his new [illegible] may be lending a helping hand.

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Will violent revolutions come to Latin America in the 1970s?

REVOLUTION NEXT DOOR: Latin America in the 1970s. By Gary MacEoin. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $6.95.

By John Adam Moreau

The major virtue of Gary MacEoin's fourth book lies in its parade of fresh and unfamiliar Latin Americans who say in their own words what they believe is the matter with Latin America and what they believe should be the remedy.

This is not an anthology but rather a work into which MacEoin has put dozens of quotes. One from Joel Gajardo, a Chilean Protestant theologian, represents the book's viewpoint: "The rich countries, both of the so-called Free World and the Soviet Bloc, continue to claim that they are trying to help us catch up with them. But their actions belie their words.

"We now know that our underdevelopment is an integral factor in their progress. They moved ahead in the first instance at our expense, and the continuance of their growth requires the maintenance of our backwardness. Naturally they prefer that we should cooperate, but they have demonstrated . . . that they will also use whatever force is necessary."

MacEoin, a lawyer, writer and a veteran Latin American and as editor, reporter and university teacher, seems to believe that unless revolutionary changes are made non-violently Latin America, violent revolution will come to most of the rea in the 1970s. However, the reader is at a loss as to what edence MacEoin puts in Gajardo's remarks — remarks any informed Latin Americans would agree with. He agrees th them only in that he doesn't take exception and seldom difies.

THIS IS THE CASE when it is claimed that Standard Oil voked the Chaco War, that the United States is responsible Latin American underdevelopment, that the CIA had a role rying to bring down the Jagan government in Guyana and t Brazilians "universally believe" the United States is re nsible for torture of political suspects in Brazil.

MacEoin quotes mostly intellectuals. A Latin American intellectual is by definition usually anti-clerical, pro-Marxist, ely to blame the United States wholesale for the region's ills d convinced that North Americans are a race of economic edators and cultural baboons. If you do not hold such views u are not a very with-it intellectual in Latin America.

But although the intellectual is greatly esteemed in Latin nerica he seldom has any significant political or economic wer.

No amount of talk, of course, can erase the miseries of this ion. However, MacEoin's book leaves the impression that e is little they can do about conditions.

There is a widely held notion — directly contrary to what appears to be MacEoin's opinion — that Latin America is, over-all, a kind of static society; that the values of the traditional oligarchy remain dominent in most places; that the relatively new middle class aligns itself with these values, and that the poor, worn-down workers and peasants align themselves with middle class values.

ONLY BOLIVIA AND MEXICO have known revolution, according to this notion, and there the whites and mestizos are still at the top. Only in Mexico has the landed oligarchy been broken. Elsewhere changes of government amount to just that and not fundamental change.

This is probably so, and the people in MacEoin's book are much like hundreds of other critics and analysts on Latin America who have come and gone since 1900. They will remain mostly impotent because they have no power, no political program. How could they? They are, after all, mostly contemptuous of politics.

John Adam Moreau, a Sun-Times editorial writer, has recently received grants for the study of Latin American affairs from the American Political Science Assn. and the Inter-American Press Assn.